


Development Priorities from the Perspective of CSOs, Donor Agencies and Government: Summary



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Foreword

A country's political, economic, and social development is determined by the efforts of various stakeholders. A shared understanding of development priorities between the public and private sector, as well as civil society is needed for all actors to collaborate effectively and achieve common development goals.

Despite being a developing country situated within a turbulent region, Jordan enjoys considerable political stability. The country possesses the constituents for a strong civil society, yet urgently needs collaborative dialogue bridging the gap between various public, private and civic actors.

To facilitate this process, the West Asia-North Africa (WANA) Institute and the Delegation of the European Union (EU) to Jordan held two discussion sessions with Jordanian civil society organisations (CSOs), donors, and government agencies. Discussion Session (I) was held on 13 December 2017 and defined Jordan's development priorities from the perspective of CSOs. Discussion Session (II) was held on 19 February 2018 with government and international donor representatives to evaluate CSOs' priorities against those of government and donors.

1 Discussion Session (I): Development Priorities from the Perspective of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)

The participating civil society organisations (CSOs) were asked the following questions:

- What are the challenges and opportunities facing development in Jordan?
- Who are the main development stakeholders in the public, private, and civic sector, and what are their respective roles? What is the role of donors?
- Which steps should be taken next?
- Will decentralisation help civil society achieve its development goals?

1.1 Development Opportunities in Jordan

Ambitious Royal Discourse

The Royal Discussion Papers and other Royal Directives by His Majesty King Abdullah II bin Al-Hussein have formulated an ambitious vision for a parliamentary government based on the model of a civil state. This civil state is projected to uphold the rule of law, foster political pluralism, and promote participation and equality among citizens.

Human Resources

The Jordanian economy can benefit from the country's large youth population, as well as from remittances sent home by Jordanian expatriates. The development of human resources is supported by the high number of higher education institutions present and the variety in specialisations they offer country-wide. Jordan's well-developed higher education institutions also attract many students from the region, particularly from Gulf Countries, promoting 'educational tourism.'

Financial Resources and Foreign Funding

While Jordan lacks natural resources, the ability of the government and civil society to attract foreign funding helps steer development and share the costs related to hosting refugees with other countries and actors.

The Decentralisation Law

Jordan's Decentralisation Law is expected to stimulate local community and civil society participation in development efforts and service provision.

Civil Society

Jordan has a large number of active CSOs carrying out development and rights-based programmes that facilitate public participation in policy design and increase public awareness of local issues.

1.2 Development Challenges in Jordan

Turbulent Regional Environment

Jordan's development is adversely impacted by regional events that threaten the country's stability and progress. Ideological conflicts and power struggles, the absence of functioning democracies, the aftermath of the Arab Spring, the influx of Palestinian, Iraqi and Syrian refugees, and the rise of violent extremism increasing military expenditures are all factors of influence.

Globalisation Benefits versus Preserving the National Identity

When economic development is discussed, international standards are aspired to and privatisation, an open market system, and the liberation of prices tend to be favoured. However, when political development is concerned, autonomy is prioritised under the pretense of national specificity, preserving cultural traditions, and upholding national security standards. This creates a conflict between interests linked to globalisation and those linked to maintaining a national identity.

Weak Management of Limited Natural Resources

Jordan's limited natural resources are managed without proper transparency and accountability.

Lack of Work Opportunities for Women

Despite Jordanian women's educational achievements, they are not represented equally in the political sphere and the workplace. High leadership positions in both public and private sectors are rarely obtained by women, which limits women's involvement in development.

Unsustainability of Development Projects

The flow of international funds to Jordan fluctuates based on the political situation in donor countries, threatening the long-term sustainability of development programmes. Furthermore, funds are often conditional to donor-driven agendas, which does not leave space for the local community to set out its own development priorities according to local needs.

Weak Link between Higher Education and Labour Market

More university students specialise in human sciences compared to natural sciences and scientific research conducted at Jordanian universities tends to be weak. There is also a weak link between the private and academic sectors, and the courses offered often seem detached from market requirements.

Inefficient Application of the Law

Despite recent efforts, a gap remains between national legislation and the International Human Rights Law. In addition, certain national legislations that are in line with the International Human Rights Law are not enforced as those in charge of enforcing them are in need of further capacity-building.

Lack of Local Community Participation in Policy Design

Not involving CSOs in the State's policy design is leading to weak strategic planning. The government also does not seek civil society's contribution to the preparation of human rights reports submitted to the United Nations, despite their prior commitment to do so.

Limited Civil Society Effectiveness

Jordanian CSOs are struggling with many restrictions. There is an abundance of syndicates, unions, associations and parties in charge of licensing CSOs. The licensing is also conditional to the approval of a certain line ministry. The prohibition of a multiplicity of syndicates of the same profession violates international standards of the right to organise. In addition, CSOs' ability to write project proposals and effectively manage and evaluate projects is often limited.

Lack of Commitment to Enforcing Human Rights

Jordan is obliged to uphold the human rights treaties it has endorsed and enforce them through its national legislations, yet the government tends to abstain from taking measures against human rights violations. In addition, the Jordanian Parliament occasionally drafts legislative provisions that are not in line with international human rights treaties. A rights-based method is essential to achieve real development, since development without respect for the civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights of citizens is not possible.

1.3 The Role of Concerned Parties in Jordan's Development Process

- **Government:** Jordan's government can be described mainly as a service-provider. Not enough attention is paid to the long-term sustainability of development projects. The government system is bureaucratic and inefficient, with corruption and nepotism negatively influencing the quality of government services. Civil servants are also in need of capacity-building programmes.
- **Security Apparatus:** A well-functioning national security apparatus is essential to provide the stability needed to achieve developmental goals. However, security should not be used as an excuse to restrict certain freedoms, such as the right to organise, and freedom of opinion and expression.
- **Municipalities** are essential development actors on the local level, yet often suffer from limited financial resources and low-skilled elected members.
- **Syndicates:** Even though professional syndicates operate largely independently, they lack pluralism.
- **Civil Society:** Jordan's civil society sector has grown over the last two decades, yet many CSOs lack the necessary funding and skills. The government also tends to carry out its development plans parallel to, instead of in partnership with, civil society. Though efforts to improve partnerships between CSOs have emerged, overall coordination remains poor.
- **Tribes:** Traditional and customary powers also have a role to play in local development. Tribal powers facilitate social cohesion and help solve local community conflicts.

2 Discussion Session (II): Development and CSOs' Role from the Perspective of Donor Agencies and the Jordanian Government

Discussion Session (II) evaluated CSOs' development priorities from Discussion Session (I) against those of government and donors. The session was attended by representatives from the Ministries of Social Development (MoSD), Planning and International Cooperation (MoPIC) and Political and Parliamentary Affairs (MoPA), in addition to donor agencies, such the European Union (EU), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), Family Health International (FHI), and consultants.

The participating government and donor representatives listed the following challenges CSOs face from their perspective:

- Lack of skills resulting in the inability to write solid project proposals.
- Insufficient awareness of available donor agency or government funding opportunities.
- Tendency to opt for conventional methods instead of creative strategies.
- Lack of knowledge-sharing and partnerships among CSOs. Personal relationships and interests tend to affect partnerships and funding deals between CSOs.
- Insufficient attention to programme sustainability.
- Lack of knowledge of the national legislations governing CSOs' work.
- Weak human resources and dependency on volunteers, limiting the build-up of expertise.
- Mismatch between CSOs' projects and local community needs.
- Lack of infrastructure, particularly in the governorates, such as office buildings, equipment, communication tools ...
- Donor preference to fund more established CSOs in the capital as opposed to smaller CSOs in the governorates.
- Insufficient transparency and monitoring of projects.
- Legislation severely restricts the work of CSOs and donor agencies. A large number of agencies are tasked with CSOs' registration, for example Ministries of Social Affairs, Political Development, Interior, Culture, Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, Industry and Trade. Obstacles remain as well in getting approval to receive international funding from donor agencies, even though certain funding entities are licensed to work in Jordan.

3 Recommendations

3.1 Discussion Session (I) Recommendations

In order to promote development in Jordan, CSOs recommended the following:

- All stakeholder need to be involved in the development planning and execution process.
- CSOs need to be able to operate freely according to their own priorities and agenda.
- International human rights standards and treaties need to be at the core of all national legislations, and project and policy designs.
- Sectors in need of assistance, such as the agricultural and industrial sectors, need to be supported by the government.
- Education needs to be invested in, and acceptance criteria at universities need to guarantee that acceptance is based on merit. Technology, natural sciences, and vocational training need to be promoted, and specialisations should be aligned with labour market needs. The quality of scientific research needs to be improved.
- The use of alternative energy in factories should be incentivised, investment in alternative energy promoted, and research on renewable energy facilitated in order to reduce Jordan's dependence on oil and increase resilience against fluctuating energy prices on international markets.
- New tourism destinations need to be developed across all governorates, and local tourism and the sale of traditional products should be boosted.
- Decent working standards need to be enforced, and the right of syndicates to work independently should be respected.
- National and international funding should be diversified to ensure sustainability. Private sector involvement needs to be increased through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), which will in turn increase trust in the private sector. Funding should be decentralised and the budget of municipalities increased to achieve local development aims.
- Democratic principles need to be promoted on all levels.
- The rule of law needs to be upheld across all State institutions to safeguard the confidence of the people in the government.
- The government should invest in programmes aimed at controlling population growth and reproductive health services.

3.2 Discussion Session (II) Recommendations

Participants agreed on the necessity to achieve the following recommendations to promote civil society's role in development in Jordan:

- Encourage donors to carry out their activities in all areas of the Kingdom, including remote areas, and allow CSOs to submit their proposals in Arabic.
- Develop the capacities of CSOs in remote areas to apply for funding and execute projects.
- The government should improve rural infrastructure to facilitate local development and reduce migration to urban areas.

- Increase awareness of political pluralism.
- Remove restrictions on political participation by university students by abolishing disciplinary actions that criminalise students' political engagement, or by removing the condition of non-enrollment in political parties for students to access army scholarships.
- Lower restrictions faced by CSOs by removing unnecessary conditions for registration and receiving funding.
- Ensure that consultations take place between donor agencies, government and civil society to jointly define priorities.
- Build trust between CSOs and government and donor agencies as follows:
 - o Engage CSOs as members of consultative committees of executive councils, such as the Education Council and Higher Education Council.
 - o Present human rights reports prepared by the government to CSOs before submitting them to the United Nations (UN).
 - o Regulate Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).
 - o Activate the participation of the CSOs in regional and international networks to further help them build their capacity.
 - o Promote legislation to facilitate women's access to work, for example by making nurseries available and extending flexible working conditions.
 - o CSOs should increase transparency in their activities and funding.



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